



SAINT JOSEPH COLLEGE SEMINARY
at Loyola University Chicago

March 11, 2019

By UPS Delivery

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich
Archbishop of Chicago
835 N. Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611

Re: St. Joseph College Seminary

Dear Cardinal Cupich,

It is with great sadness that we are writing this letter to you on behalf of the undersigned members of the St. Joseph College Seminary Board of Advisors. For all of us, it has been an honor to serve on the Board. What a great blessing it has been to be associated with so many fine priests and lay persons involved in the future of our Catholic church here in Chicago. We have experienced the maturing of young men as they discerned their vocation to the priesthood. We have felt that God was truly at work in these students as they brought so much new life to our church, from the seminary to parishes, and even to our own families. Many Board members' families became involved in the effort to support our future priests through fundraising events like the annual Seminary Salutes Dinner and other events held for the benefit of the students of St. Joe's. It was important to us that our children be present for a cause that we hold so dear because they, among the many youth of this Archdiocese, are the future, yours and ours!

For almost sixty (60) years, your predecessors have supported the college seminary in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Cardinal Albert Meyer, an important contributor to the Second Vatican Council and a former seminary rector himself, established the college seminary at the sight of the former St. Hedwig's Orphanage in Niles, Illinois in 1962. The first class to study at what soon became **Niles College Seminary** was ordained in 1968. Later, Cardinal John Cody continued his support for the college seminary and created the academic affiliation between Niles College and Loyola University which allowed students to receive their degrees from this respected Jesuit University. Then, in 1994, the seminary land in Niles was sold and the program relocated into a dormitory, Campion Hall, on the Loyola University campus. The difficult decision to close, sell and relocate the college seminary was made *only after extensive consultation and collaboration* by your predecessor, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, with those involved in priestly formation in the Archdiocese. At the time of this move from Niles, Illinois to Loyola University, Chicago, the seminary was renamed **St. Joseph College Seminary** in honor of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin.

Not that long ago, Cardinal Francis George once again *renewed* the Archdiocese of Chicago's long-time commitment to the young men discerning priesthood. Watching our new building on the Loyola campus, the fruit of many years of discussion and planning by the Board of Advisors, Seminary Rectors and other Archdiocesan officials, become a reality was a privilege to each of us. Much time was taken to approach this project in a fiscally responsible manner and to choose the best design and location for our college seminary. We will always remember the sparkle in the eyes of Cardinal George as he troweled the mortar in setting the *cornerstone* and took time to have a picture taken with every person there on that day, including each tradesman on the job. The new facility was the ideal choice for seminarians to be part of college life in a Catholic setting while going through the formation process as future priests. The hope that we felt at that time for the future of our church in Chicago was solidified in the spectacular new facility that many people sacrificed so much and worked so hard to create.

On August 28, 2012, the new St. Joseph College Seminary building was dedicated and the *Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary* was consecrated by Cardinal George. That day, the joy in the hearts of all who were present was palpable and each of us took home a small piece of the *cornerstone* of the building inscribed with the commemoration: **"Building a Foundation for the Future"** (an actual piece of the foundation stone is included). To the disciples who asked the Lord a simple question: "*Rabbi, where do you stay?*" Jesus gave a very simple answer . . . "*Come and See.*" (John 1:38-39). Each of us who was there that day ***could see the results*** of much hard work. Each of us who was there ***could see the place*** where seminarians for the next 100 years would stay, pray, grow and eventually become disciples of Jesus. Each of us who was there ***could see the presence of Jesus Christ*** as the Archdiocese *renewed* its half-century commitment to the formation of college seminarians.

With all of that being said, the recent announcement to close St. Joseph College Seminary was unexpected and disturbing. The primary reasons given were "changing demographics" and that the numbers of seminarians were too low (20+ current students). While the very recent numbers have been disappointing to us as well, we've been more focused on the quality of young men over quantity. Moreover, the *Quigley Scholar Program* for High School students was just beginning to bear significant fruit. Naturally, we, as a Board, expected more from you than just an 11-minute announcement with no advance warning or dialogue. Discussion with the Board regarding your concern about the "numbers" would have been our expectation and a far more appropriate approach. Instead, the decision appears to have been made in a vacuum. We come from many different professions and life experiences as members of the Catholic Church. We also represent the seminary to our own church communities. You had the opportunity to use our talents and resources to determine a solid course for the future of our church, yet you did not do so. As a priest friend commented after the announcement: "*If we do not invest in young men to consider priesthood, then who/what do we invest in here in the Archdiocese of Chicago?*" We would like to hear your response!

The complete lack of transparency surrounding this decision (neither the Board nor the Rector were consulted) seems symptomatic of many issues currently affecting the church. Aside from the horrible impact this decision will have on the Seminarians and our church in the future, we feel compelled to tell you that this unfortunate approach to *decision-making* is driving people away—not encouraging openness and healing to a broken church. Your unidentified “advisors” who apparently recommended this abrupt action could not have considered the effects of this unfortunate decision. When veiled in complete secrecy, how can we, as a Board of Advisors with years of dedicated service and millions of dollars raised, conclude anything other than that this was a decision bereft of objective criteria and prayerful discernment? While talk about “*transparency and accountability*” is a noble goal, here there was neither.

The undersigned members of the St. Joseph College Seminary Board of Advisors strongly disagree with this major decision that has already had a negative impact on our Catholic communities. We have received numerous questions and unfavorable comments, along with expressed verbal concern for the future of this Catholic Archdiocese and where it is going. Cardinal Cupich, you certainly have to make the best decision possible. However, your total disregard for the Board of Advisors, our Rector-President and others in the Archdiocese who have made significant financial contributions to the college seminary over many decades, together with the lack of any apparent consultation in making this decision, speaks volumes about the value, or lack of it, that you place on us, as financial supporters and Board members, and on the long history of Niles College and St. Joseph College Seminary. We await your response with prayerful anticipation.

In Christ we remain,

The St. Joseph College Seminary Board of Advisors